

**Written Statement of Jason Van Tatenhove
Former National Media Director for the Oath Keepers**

**Before the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack
on the United States Capitol**

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My name is Jason Van Tatenhove, and I am a journalist and author living in Colorado. I am here giving testimony to the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol because, for a short period, I had access to an inside view of both the inner workings of the Oath Keepers and its founder and president, Stewart Rhodes. From the beginning, I knew this would be a story that the world would someday need to hear. I am deeply saddened by how correct this intuition was.

I come from a family of artists and writers and have always worked in some way as an artist and journalist. I am local to Colorado, where I have written for several outlets in Northern Colorado. It is important for me to be here today in front of the Select Committee because all Americans need to pay attention to the genuine danger that extremist groups like the Oath Keepers pose to us and our society. Because of the actions taken on January 6th and the increased political and ideological polarization in our society, I fear what the next election cycle will bring. We need to re-learn how to communicate with one another without guns, body armor, or standoffs. I am trying to make amends for what I did during my time with the Oath Keepers because I am remorseful for helping them push their dangerous propaganda. In light of the Select Committee's work and the truth they have uncovered, I am optimistic that this experience and my voice can help to shed light on these issues and to embolden others to walk away from extremist groups like the Oath Keepers.

I want to note at the outset that my first-hand knowledge of the Oath Keepers stopped when I resigned, as I will describe. But given my insider access and close proximity to Stewart Rhodes – including during several months when he lived in my basement – I can help to paint a picture of the Oath Keepers, how they worked, how they operated, and how dangerous they are. I do not know about the planning or execution of events surrounding what happened at the Capitol on January 6th, 2021. Still, from my experience with the ever-radicalizing organization, I know the troubling signs were there years before.

My journey with the Oath Keepers began during the 2014 Bundy Ranch Standoff. I was embedded with Stewart Rhodes in his vehicle as he made his second trip down to the standoff in the desert of Nevada. I was given unprecedented access to Stewart Rhodes and the Oath Keepers, including the organization's inner workings. This access continued as I covered the subsequent two standoffs: the Sugar Pine Mine standoff and the White Hope Mine standoff.

This culminated in a job offer with the Oath Keepers after my name was included in a press release by the group, which led to my resignation from working for the State of Montana. I was

offered a job as the National Media Director and Webpage Associate Editor for the organization. I worked closely with Stewart Rhodes for the next year and a half and often traveled with him to various events throughout the United States.

During this period, I saw Stewart Rhodes courting members of the alt-right. Having issues with this radicalization, I knew I had to make a break with the group, even if it would be financially devastating to my family. There came the point when I walked in on a conversation in a local grocery store where long-standing, influential Oath Keeper members and associates were discussing their thoughts openly, denying that the Holocaust had ever actually happened. At that moment, I decided that no matter what, I would need to break ties with this ever-radicalizing group. I am not a racist, I am not an anti-Semite, I am not a white supremacist, I am not violent, and I could no longer be associated with the Oath Keepers, whatever the consequences might have been.

I now view it as my obligation to sound the alarm and raise public awareness about the Oath Keepers and to get my perspective on this paramilitary group into the public conversation. While this may come as a surprise to some, many of the true motivations of this group revolve around raising funds, and not the propaganda they push. Stewart Rhodes and the Oath Keepers insert themselves into crises, situations that they would not usually have any part of, and seek to make themselves relevant and fundraise on the back of these conflicts to increase the membership rolls.

Recruitment is a crucial focus for the Oath Keepers, and a target demographic is people that feel marginalized. I have seen these individuals whipped up into dangerous action by the group's leadership, just as we saw on January 6th.

This, combined with catering to the conspiracy theories of the day and an attempt to connect with ever-radicalizing communities within the alt-right, white nationalists, and even outright racists to gain more influence and money, is a dangerous proposition for our country. We cannot allow these groups to continue threatening our democracy. We must focus on understanding this reality and, most importantly, combating them.

There have been times when I have personally discounted the reach of this group and its violent messaging. This was a mistake. Because in the end, they were able to muster a group of heavily armed and outfitted members who had been trained in modern warfare techniques, including those we now know had explosives, to storm the Capitol to stop the process of inaugurating the duly elected president.

We have been exceedingly lucky in that we have not seen much more bloodshed. But luck is not a good strategy for a country looking for better ways to move forward.

It is time to speak the truth about these groups and the violent influence they wield. It is time to show an exit ramp to others like me who may have been caught up in the rhetoric of these groups and used as pawns in a dishonest campaign to capture more money, influence, and

power. I have been frightened by what I saw when I was associated with the Oath Keepers and even more so by what I saw on January 6th. I am honored to provide my perspective to the Select Committee and the American people.